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U.S.-Ghana spy swap seen as two admit link to CIA

By Ed Rogers
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Guilty pleas filed in Ghana yesterday by two men accused of spying for the CIA set off speculation that the U.S. government may attempt to save their lives by making a spy swap with the West African nation.

The two Ghanaians, who face a possible death penalty, are expected to be sentenced today, according to the national news agency GNA.

The plea changes were made one day after U.S. officials postponed the trial of a Ghanaian spy suspect, Michael Agbotui Soussoudis, who is believed to be a first cousin of Ghana's ruler, Flight Lt. Jerry Rawlings.

The postponement, until Dec. 9, was arranged at a closed court hearing Monday in Alexandria, Va., that was attended by Ghanaian Ambassador Eric Otoo and four embassy aides.

The U.S. attorney's office said the hearing was closed in compliance with the Classified Information Procedures Act because the trial evidence may include national security information.

Neither U.S. nor Ghanaian officials would explain why a foreign ambassador was allowed to attend a hearing that was closed to the public to prevent a possible breach of national security.

"It is a very, very sensitive matter," an embassy aide said.

The combination of the guilty pleas in Ghana, the trial postponement in this country and the ambassador's presence at the closed court hearing led to speculation that something more than routine pre-trial matters was involved.

Mr. Soussoudis, 39, has been charged with receiving U.S. secrets, including the names of CIA informants and Ghanaian dissidents, from Sharon Scranage, 29, while she was a clerk at the CIA office in Accra, Ghana, from 1983 to 1985.

Disclosures of the spy operation last July led to fears that U.S. intelligence sources in Ghana had been placed in grave jeopardy.

The Ghanaian defendants were identified as Theodore Atiedu, a police inspector formerly with Ghana's Bureau of National Investigations, and Felix Peasah, a security officer at the U.S. Embassy.

They changed their pleas from not guilty as their trial resumed after a four-week interruption, which their lawyers obtained so they could study the charges against the men.

The closed hearing before U.S. District Judge Claude Hilton brought about a third postponement of Mr. Soussoudis' trial date. Assistant U.S. Attorney Justin Williams said there may be another closed hearing on Dec. 9.

Miss Scranage admitted her collaboration with Mr. Soussoudis, who was said to be her lover, after she was transferred to the CIA headquarters in Washington and was tripped up by a routine polygraph test.

In papers filed with the court, she admitted revealing the identities of CIA agents and officials in Ghana to Mr. Soussoudis, knowing that he was delivering the information to Ghanaian officials.

She pleaded guilty to two of 15 espionage counts and agreed to testify against Mr. Soussoudis.